The Interspecies Newsletter

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Incident at Boat Bay

Jim's Story

I had been ill, stole off from camp to spend most of the afternoon sleeping on the boat. Refreshed, I was rowing back to shore in the dinghy when I heard the first scream. My first thought was that one of the three little girls in camp had gotten stung again by a yellowjacket. Then a second scream. This one was much louder, much more urgent, announcing more pain than any single yellowjacket could cause. Again, I thought it was a child, perhaps my five year old daughter Sasha who occasionally screams like a banshee. Maybe somebody stepped on a hive. What a fate.

From my offshore vantage point, I now noticed all the people in the camp kitchen standing up. Listening. When the third scream came, everyone went running into the woods.

Then a fourth scream of such wrenching substance that it caused all other sounds in the world to vanish. And finally, capping all the rest of them, a fifth one, a veritable monster of a scream that rose out of the woods with so much volume and momentum that I felt myself turning pale from the very sound of it. Suddenly I understood. A woman was screaming for her life in the forest at the back of the little cove where my own family had recently set up its tent.

I rowed faster. Then I heard my wife Katy yelling at me, motioning at me to row harder, row faster towards the little cove. "It's Jill...she's hurt.. there's a mountain lion...it's just standing there. We can't get past it...go see if you can pick her up by boat." I rowed quickly around the point of the kitchen and into the little cove. Jill was standing there at the shore, bleeding from the shoulder and the head. She was leaning on Linda, then the two of them were up to their waists in the cold ocean water, Linda guiding Jill out to the point and around back to the kitchen. They didn't need my help. I brought the dinghy into shore.

Gene was standing at the tideline with a ten foot long driftwood branch held tightly in his hands like a baseball bat. "Do you see it?" he asked, pointing his stick towards the dark forest line. "Look where the trail touches the beach...a cougar got Jill." I looked at the trail but saw nothing. I took several steps forward. "Be careful, it's still there." I didn't see it. Didn't want to walk any closer. I motioned to Gene to climb into the dinghy and the two of us quickly rowed back to the kitchen.

Katy and Linda were tending to Jill's bleeding scalp, dabbing at deep puncture wounds on her shoulder, back, and thigh. I was certain the cougar must have grabbed her with its claws. "That's where he grabbed me with his teeth." she said in a surprisingly calm voice. It was then I noticed that her bloody, torn, t-shirt, representing her own bike shop, Wildlife Cycles, had a huge cat's face silkscreened onto the back of it. I looked her over, noticed that the bleeding had diminished from her head wound and concluded she was not in any grave danger. But she needed more attention than we could give her in camp. Someone mentioned sutures, rabies and a tetanus shot. Then I noticed that the three little girls were leaning on the same huge log shivering from the cold. Their clothes were wet. I walked over to them, hugged all three of them to me at once. I also noticed

Jonathan shooting footage with his video camera. Knowing him as I do, it was a comforting sign that the crucial issue of the moment was well under control. "Someone needs to call the Coast Guard," Katy said, looking right at me.

It was Joseph's 65 foot boat we were using to work with the orcas. It was his radio. "Where's Joseph?" I asked. "He can do that."

"Here I am," he said from behind me. He was holding a rifle in his hands. Then I saw Keith standing at the edge of our outdoor kitchen holding a shotgun. I have never been comfortable around guns. They are the icon of a culture I do not wish to live in, the accessory of a nature lover who kills animals to feel a bond with it. I had not known that Joseph kept guns on the boat.

"Did you just call the Coast Guard?" I asked him.

"No I didn't. Do we need to?"

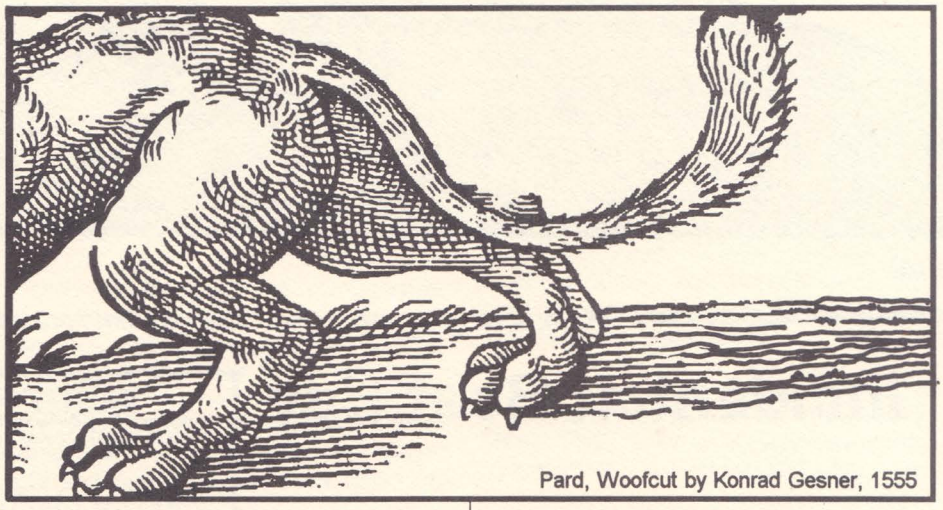
"Yes, please, will you go back to the boat and call the coast guard. Tell them we need some help."

"I'm probably the best shot here." He answered firmly. "I need to deal with that cougar."

My face tensed. The image of Gene carrying a big stick came to mind. The presence of guns in this--or any other situation for that matter--was completely foreign to my mind. I took Joseph aside. "Listen, I'm pleading with you not to shoot that animal. If you see it, fire over its head. That should scare it away. But please do not shoot the cougar."

Then I heard Jill pipe up. "Don't shoot it. This is the cougar's land. You're asking it to pay a pretty big price for some human being's two week summer vacation."

I stood there for a brief second deciding what to do. The point had obviously been made. Then I announced, "We should have a doctor look at those wounds. I guess I'm the one who needs to call the Coast Guard." I rowed the dinghy back to the boat, feeling apprehensive over taking myself out of the loop of potential events. No more than ten minutes had passed since I'd left the boat the first time.



Pard, Woofcut by Konrad Gesner, 1555

I was on the radio talking to the Coast Guard emergency officer, discussing the quickest way to get Jill across fifty miles of water and forest land to the nearest hospital when I heard a gunshot. My face drained. I somehow knew that Joseph had shot the cat. Katy would later tell me that at that precise moment Jill, Linda, herself, and the three girls all started crying.

A Predator's Story

The idea that a forest is a dangerous place is deeply rooted in the oldest part of the human brain. Although our ape ancestors surely lived in the trees, and learned to be comfortable therein, a direct ancestor of ours, Australopithecus, migrated out of the dark forest over a million years ago and onto the grasslands of East Africa. It was at that moment that the human psyche started its lonely one-way march away from the forest, away from the rest of animal kingdom. Most of us have never looked back.

If the dangerous forest is as much a myth as a reality, then our own recent cougar experience verifies that the myth of the dangerous predator is also a reality. Although most human beings would agree that the large predators are as dangerous as they were a hundred, a thousand years ago, an actual confrontation is now, perhaps, more dangerous for the predators than it is for us. For instance, despite their protection under law, the cougars of the Pacific Northwest are routinely shot on sight at the first inkling of danger to human beings. Jonathan will later relate the story of a mountain lion taking a goat on his farm on Vancouver Island. When he reported the incident, the authorities arrived quickly thereafter. Their only intention was to dispatch the cat. In Jonathan's own words, the cat was duly killed "for following its own bliss."

The morning after "our" lion was shot, wildlife officials arrived at our camp with guns and bloodhounds. Their decision to seek a kill was automatic. When Jim asked their leader about other options the man answered that several people were camped just a mile from us and a wounded cat was extremely dangerous. Jim asked him if he would be so quick to shoot the cougar if it wasn't wounded. The man answered that a cat who tasted human blood was always dangerous. When Jim asked how he arrived at that conclusion, the man snickered and assured him it was a well-known fact. Jim finally asked if the man would consider relinquishing the body to the group for a burial. No, the body was needed for tests.

In general, the tone these professional stalkers brought to their mission suggested nothing but formal legalities. It sounded as if an unwritten contractual agreement had been breached by the lion. Death was the "sentence".

Much irony can be mined from this brief two minute conversation. Perhaps less obvious, this same conversation also reveals the denial of any animal lover

wishing to "exonerate" the cougar because it is a wild animal inhabitant of wilderness. Boat Bay has not been wilderness for many years now. It is a "forest reserve", perhaps a park; either way, the site of much human occupancy. And wilderness is different than a park. Wilderness is a place where predators hunt what they choose, while people visit at their own risk.

But if this is no longer wilderness, then where do the declining populations of wolves, grizzlies, and cougars who still inhabit the "forest reserve" get to live within this new arrangement of their habitat? Can humans live near predators without also honoring the risk?

Searching for an answer goes to the heart of a deep human yearning to encounter paradise within wildness. But that yearning is a lie. The place where lions lie down with lambs is nothing but a cruel hoax because every instinct and muscle of a cougar is honed for killing. Even the environmentalists who work to save predators do not actually want one living nearby. The presence of people--whether they are avid animal rights advocates, poachers, or anything in between--signifies that the predators inhabiting the area either alter their behavior (which is impossible), or risk extermination (which is currently occurring just about everywhere).

Boat Bay offers a perfect example. Interspecies Communication Inc. has been visiting this same cove to work with orcas for fifteen years. But whereas the whales used to sing with the musicians on the record studio/boat for hours at a time, they have avoided our attempts at interaction entirely over the past few summers. That is the precise reason this trip was always planned to be a farewell voyage: farewell to the friendly whales whose behavior has turned regimented just to deal with increasing boat traffic, farewell to the music making that once marked the relationship between the orcas and ourselves, farewell to the millions of ling cod annihilated as a result of poorly regulated commercial fishing, farewell to the forest which is being cut down everywhere and which inevitably drives the remaining predators out of the woods and into more inhabited areas.

Cougars are shot for being cougars. We might justly conclude that humans shoot them because we are human. Over several hundred years of this manifested deadly relationship, those cougars exhibiting any measure of curiosity or outgoing behavior were always the first ones to be shot. Likewise, only the stealthiest and most fearful of the species survived. If there had ever been even a few token, friendly, "ambassador" cougars who sought out human contact as dolphins still do today; then no one will ever know about it unless they read between the lines of native mythology. Or going further back, once again to Africa, we probably do not need to look any further than the origination of the bond between people and housecats.

Our own cursory research about the depth of the *local* relationship between cougar and humans revealed many Kwakuitl myths and designs about ravens, bears, orcas, salmon, beavers, and a host of other creatures. We found none relating to cougars.

The earliest known killing of predators not actively threatening humans, goes at least as far back as the Paleolithic. There are caves scattered high in the Swiss Alps that served as Neanderthal ceremonial sites for honoring the spirit of the cave bear. Some grottoes inside the caves were utilized as chapels where the congregation worshipped at an altar of mounted bear skulls. These bear chapels are culturally significant to us today because they offer the relics of the earliest known religion. Tragically, the exuberance of the Neanderthal cult probably resulted in the eventual extinction of the cave bear. Because that demise may have destroyed Neanderthal religion, it conceivably precipitated the parallel extinction of the Neanderthal race.

Shaman being devoured and thus initiated by jaguar god, classic maya , 800 AD

How does this same circular pattern relate to our own civilization driving predators out of the deep forest by relentless clearcutting and then shooting them in so called *unrelated incidents* as they show up in areas newly populated by humans? In fact, the predators become what we make of them: coevolved into creatures of the shadow world admired for their strength and stealthiness, but justifiably feared and thus eventually annihilated for the crime of inhibiting human recreational opportunities.

Jill would later write: "most prey species remove themselves from a threat. But humans have a hard time being threatened. We have fire alarms. We get guns. We believe in health, life, and car insurance. Then we visit a place for its wildness, to commune with nature which includes a genuine risk. But in reality, it is nature at risk. And in this case, the shooting of the cougar is best understood as an insurance killing."

Arriving at this conclusion, there is no intention here to obscure the gravity of the cougar attack. Gene, who spent two tours of duty in Viet Nam soon revealed the story of waking up in a foxhole at Khe Sanh only to notice that a man who slept nearby had been carried off in the night by a tiger. We all agreed that Jill had been very lucky. She spotted the cat at the edge of the beach as she returned from washing her hair. She backed away from it, but then tripped over a log. The cat pounced and started biting her. She had the extraordinary

Cougar pot design, Cocle, Panama

presence of mind not to resist but screamed instead. In hindsight, she believed that the screams caused the cat to back off. It watched her from atop a log like any cat watching a mouse, ready to pounce again at any moment.

It was at that precise moment that Linda encountered the cat crouching on a log along the tunnel-like trail leading onto the beach. She stopped to appraise her options. How was she going to get past the cat to Jill? The next thing she remembered she was standing by Jill, leading her into the water. Jill would soon point out to me that the three children had been playing on that very spot just an hour beforehand. She referred to herself as the sacrificial adult, remarking, "better me than one of them". Gene would later underscore this point by calling the children "small game." A few days later, Jonathan would find several mats of loose fur in a cleft above the camp, strongly indicating that the cat had been watching us ever since we arrived.

The professional hunters filled in yet another key piece of the puzzle. Where the cougar was shot, amidst scattered bits of bone, teeth, and the bullet slug, were found fragments of porcupine quill. In Linda's estimation, the cougar was probably in a great deal of pain which would also explain why it let go of Jill. If it's mouth was full of quills, it would not be able to kill its normal prey.

Sandra's Story

I heard Katy and Linda express worry that Joseph and Keith would shoot the mountain lion. I immediately went into the woods asking them to show me the cat. They pointed to a log. The cougar was crouched low not far from us. The late afternoon sun light filtered through the trees making it hard to see clearly for any length of time. Joseph and Keith both had guns and I could sense they couldn't decide whether to use them and in which way. I asked to have a few minutes to "communicate" with the lion. Mountain lions are one of my animal totems and I have been involved with them in different circumstances throughout my life. I felt the strong desire to participate in what was happening with this lion in this moment.

I tried to settle the tension in my body, never doing so to my satisfaction, because the timing felt rushed. I sensed the mountain lion was young, one and half to two and a half years, a full grown male. He was still in a state of predation after attacking Jill a few minutes beforehand. He was confused by the reactions of various humans he encountered and here he was having a visual encounter with three humans where no movement was occurring.

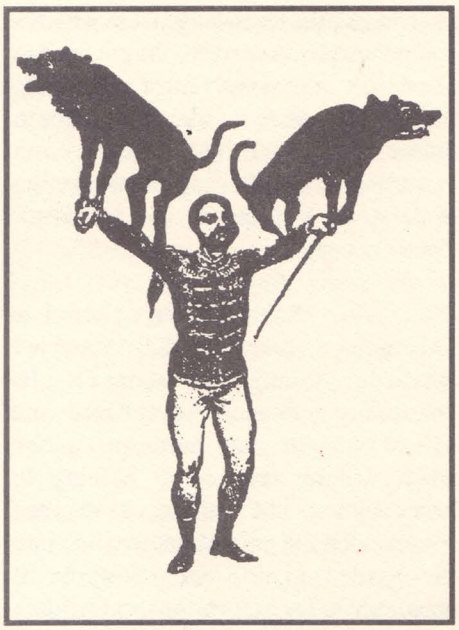
I didn't sense fear from him, but rather confusion and caution. I asked the lion if he was willing to lose his life. The answer was a clear "yes". I then told Joseph that it was alright to shoot him. Joseph took one shot. What happened next felt like I was seeing action in slow motion. The cougar leapt into the air projected by his hind quarters and turned in midair before landing. He slowly ran up the mountain side and was gone from our sight. Joseph told me he felt the shot hit the lion. He and Keith went up the slope after the cat but couldn't find him. I kept a watchful eye on them until they returned, while dealing emotionally with what had just occurred. A cougar had entered our camp for what reason? Attacked Jill for what reason? Had just been shot but not killed. Would he be back?

My feeling as to why he was there came to me while I stood there alone. He had been watching our activities during that afternoon. In particular, the Nollman's seven year old daughter, Claire, had gone through the woods to her tent alone a few times. I wondered if he had been waiting near the tent for the next opportunity to get closer to Claire, when Jill suddenly arrived from the other direction. I felt he wasn't interested in Jill, or perhaps wasn't even aware of her at the time. He was keeping an eye out for the girls.

Linda's Story

The day after the shooting I felt a great need to maintain a listening presence here on the cougar's land. I wished the cat would stagger into camp and die in my arms, though I don't know why in wildest hell it would come back to give me the gift of its death--except that I would take it tenderly and sing its song and ask forgiveness and in some very small way balance this tragedy, bridge the conflict with some act of compassion. We are all overwhelmed with the enormity of the injustice to the cougar - that our being here has unwittingly led to its greater suffering and ultimate demise.

I don't blame the man who shot the cougar. There are only minor differences in the way fear was manifest in each of us. "Fight or flight" is the choice of the biological being who feels threatened.



And yet, I have higher expectations of ourselves as beings who are clearly more than an accumulation of biologic responses. Fear is a great motivator, but the actions to which it motivates us are almost never our best actions. They are more often the lowest common denominator, culturally and personally.

After I came home, I found a story, recounted by Ursula LeGuin, called "May's Lion", in which a cougar comes out of the hills to a woman's farm and lays in the yard, not leaving. She gets nervous, she calls someone, the police come and the cougar is shot. She feels sad, oddly betrayed at the cougar's death by shooting, but she doesn't know what else to do. LeGuin then retells the story as fiction wherein the cougar comes down, lays in the yard, not leaving. But this time the woman recognizes that the cat is dying and sings to it as the people of her place and time sing to the dying of their own species. LeGuin realizes that the woman in the true story felt the loss of a tradition of compassionate connection to animals, even predators whose legitimate prey is ourselves. The woman acts from a fear which obscures the possibility of any creative course of action. The fictional woman is also afraid. She reaches beyond her fear and adapts what she knows to the new situation. The result is the same: the cougar dies. But the quality of its passing is ineffably heightened for all participants.

When I read this I cried with the pain of recognition. This was our dilemma. We were afraid and we fell into the same hole. Our culture's obliteration of other compassionate courses of action led directly to deadly force, the lowest common denominator of any culture. It's not so much what happens that's important, but HOW it happens.

It is not likely there will be a "next time", in terms of being witness to a cougar attack and an attack on the cougar. I also know, and know deeply, that if and when I experience that level of biological fear again, I will be better equipped to follow the third choice: that of reaching backwards and forwards to the times when we knew, and will know, that our connection to other animals is sacred, natural and logical. This knowledge is the gift I was given by the cougar, the gun and the people of the Orca Trip 1992, and I thank all with my heart.

Conjectural Blame

Richard Nixon once commented that the judgement of history depends on those who write it. Bob Dylan sang: "I'll let you be in my dream if I can be in yours." The retelling of the cougar incident adds yet another variation to this same theme: history provides therapy for historians.

Jim is the editor of this newsletter and the main instigator of this group disclosure. He resisted reporting on this story because of the discouragement he felt over "our" decision to shoot the animal, and because, in fact, two friends, Joseph and Sandra, stood responsible. Although each of them brought entirely different logic to that decision, neither rationale has been able to ease his feeling of outrage and loss. Only this retelling has been able to do that.

Confronting Jim's discouragement directly, Joseph quoted Jean-Paul Sartre who once wrote that a person can not judge another's ethical decision in terms of ethics, but only in terms of context. Jim answered that context does not justify the waiving of compassion. Rather, compassion, itself, is the context we need to nurture most when dealing with wild animals.

Attempting to neutralize the potential conflict of these two clashing worldviews, both Jonathan and Linda would later remark that "in the intensity of a crisis, people revert to their most basic instincts". Because we react to a crisis from our gut and not from our ideals, compassion demands there be no blame afterwards.

Contextual hindsight also nurtured much conjecture about what might have been. For instance, if Joseph hadn't shot the cat, Jill's attendance by the Coast Guard would have still sent the professional hunters and their trained bloodhounds to our camp the next morning. The unharmed cat would have probably remained in the vicinity, and assuredly been shot. Or what if we somehow avoided reporting the cat's deed--perhaps obfuscating Jill's wounds as a nasty fall off a cliff into some sharp tree branches--how might we, ourselves, have felt about that coverup a week later, a month later, when the desperate cat stalked a nearby research camp and killed somebody?

We do well to quote Sartre once again and conclude that, indeed, there was no exit. The cat was probably doomed which leads to yet another conjectural question with no easy answer: why, as a culture, do we so often favor violent solutions to our crises?

Given that harsh truth, Sandra would later write an epitaph which went very far in ameliorating our own complicity: "I am grateful in retrospect that we took the responsibility. Though the cougar was wounded in a way which would eventually prove fatal, it could now choose its place of dying, unnoticed by hunters and dogs." Then again, too bad the shot failed to kill the animal outright. And too bad our memories are so prone to comparison with the ideal.

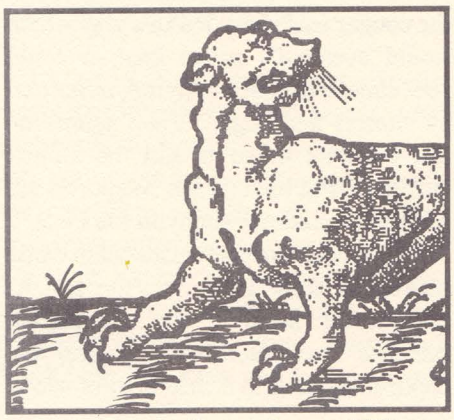
In fact, an inverse relationship exists between a conjectural question and its conjectural answer. As speculation becomes ever more provocative, the opportunity to find a firm answer seems

ever more remote. That is the precise reason that the most inspiring conjecture often seems the most useless.

Plumbing that inverse relationship, Jonathan would later turn blame on its head by voicing the most tantalizing and arguably the most useless question of all: ''did Interspecies Communication Inc actually bring on the cougar attack? If, as is often suggested, the planet is presently paying us humans back for our collective aggression, then perhaps IC's general benign purpose was not focused enough to distinguish it from so many other human endeavors perpetrated upon the natural world. If IC is thus 'camouflaged', perhaps the cougar attack signals a need for some inner and outer house cleaning that would assist IC, and would then assist the animals with which IC comes in contact. If we allow the karmic law of retribution its full measure of influence, maybe IC created its own reality and deserved the pain it suffered.''

Maybe so. And then again, maybe not. And either way, dear reader, regard this report of the incident at Boat Bay as our own group account of that same karmic housecleaning. For those of us who took part in this history-as-therapy, the retelling of the story has gone very far to help us relinquish our feelings of blame, sorrow and loss. The deed is done. It is finished. Sensing the clarity that comes from completion, we are now ready to return to a state of grace.

--compiled by Jim Nollman, including written statements by Linda Campbell, Sandra Wilson, and Jonathan Churcher



Pard, woodcut by Konrad Gesner, 1555

Book Reviews

❖ Finding Home ❖
Writings on Nature and Culture

Edited by Peter Sauer
Beacon Press (1992)

I suppose there is some risk for any reviewer to critique a book to which he or she has contributed, but quite honestly I felt humbled to be included in this collection of ''the best of Orion Magazine''. The essays include thoughts on everything from digging up a wild Christmas Tree by Barbara Dean, to being both an environmentalist *and* a real estate developer by Wallace Kaufman; from the performance shamanism of David Abram, to a science fiction story by yours truly, Jim Nollman, about tagging whales as viewed from the late 21st century.

I took this book along as my only reading on a long solo backpack across the northern tip of Baffin Island this summer. It was stunning and wonderful; helped my eyes, ears, and heart open more fully to the silent wilderness that opened up all around me.

...Magic then, in its most primordial sense, is the experience of living in a world made up of multiple intelligences, the intuition that every natural form one perceives, from the swallows swooping overhead to the fly on a blade of grass and indeed the blade of grass itself--is an experencing form, and entity with its own predilections and sensations, albeit sensations that are very different than our own. (David Abram)

...The number of people with first-hand experience in the land continues to dwindle. Rural populations continue to shift to the cities. The family farm is in a state of demise, and government and industry continue to apply pressure on the native peoples of North America to sever their ties with the land. In the wake of this loss of personal and local knowledge, the knowledge from which a real geography is derived, the knowledge on which a country must ultimately stand, has come to be something hard to define but I think sinister and unsettling--the packaging and marketing of land as a form of entertainment. (Barry Lopez)

...When Saint Antony cleared a little garden, desert animals trampled the beds. Antony caught one of the unknowing offenders and asked the animal why he was harming Antony when Antony was doing nothing to harm him. The solitary saint then commanded the animal not to come into the garden again, and in apparent obedience to his orders, the local wildlife ceased trespassing on the cultivated area. In another version of the story, Jerome reports that the animals, wild asses in this instance, returned after the rebuke from Antony, but only drank water and never again molested the vegetable patch. The animal's obedience to Antony's word was a sign of the man's holiness. (Susan Power Bratton)

... It is now extrmely difficult for us to grasp the late twentieth century worldview that depicted nonhuman species as unpossessed of any powers of perception beyond the bare rudiments of consciousness. Immersed as humans were within the deadness of this view, how easy it was to go about the late twentieth cenutry business of eradicating so many species. (Jim Nollman)

❖ Wisdomkeepers ❖
Meetings with Native American Spiritual Elders

by Steve Wall and Harvey Arden
Beyond Words Publishing (1990)

Yet another important book from Beyond Words, who seem to be remaing the image of the coffeetable book; from a piece of pretty literary furniture to a source of deep inspiration. I consider this particular edition to be the most

quotable book of the year for all aspiring nature writers and seekers. One small complaint, is that the writer, Harvey Arden is actually the editor, and credit thus seems misappopriated. This book mostly contains the words and stories of living and recently deceased native elders. The photographs give context to their words.

...The spiritual heritage of Native American People is here--it has not been extinguished. I believe the spiritual fire still burns and is beckoning for America, indeed, the world, to come closer to listen, to learn, and to share the warmth and comfort...the grandfathers and grandmothers are in the children. If we educate them, our children tomorrow will be wiser than we are today.

...You got to be careful with these things. There's no heavier burden than being a healer. (Vernon Cooper, Lumbee)

...Birds have always been important to the Indian because they go where they wish, they light where they may, and they're free. We take these feathers from the birds. We use them in our ceremony because they remind us of the Creator. The eagle flies highest in the sky and so he is the nearest to the Creator and his feather is the most sacred of all. (Buffalo Jim, Seminole)

...God made everything so simple. Our lives are very simple. The only law we obey is the natural law, God's law. We abide only by that. We don't need your church. We have the Black Hills for a church. And we don't need your Bible. We have the wind and the rain and the stars for our Bible. The world is an open Bible. (Mathew King, Lakota)

...There is no word for ''nature'' in my language. Nature, in English, seems to refer to that which is separate from human beings. It is a distinction we do not recognize.The closest word to the idea of ''nature'' translate to refer to things which support life.

(Audrey Shenandoah, Onondaga)

❖ Full Circle ❖

Song of Ecology and Earthen Spirituality

by Lone Wolf Circles
Llewellyn Publications (1991)

I've often thought of my friend, Lone Wolf Circles, as the head minstrel of the Deep Ecology Movement. This collection of his drawings, poetry and ruminations tells his story well, and gives all of us an inkling of one powerful path to spiritual and environmental peacemaking.

...Run, lion!Run! These mountain sides would not be the same without your sensual touch, your sacred touch. Run from the killers and the condos that spell your doom in dollar signs. Your every move is a perfected ballet, a complete poem one must deserve to see. The deer owe their strength and alertness to you. The wild turkey owe their pounding wings to you. Run, Lion! Run! You are the spirit that fills me.

...Being the son of the hidden wild things,
I was the one chosen

Unexpected,
The snow blew in like sleep
Against the Winter Pale.

All things hush
At this mellowing tune
of falling crystal,
A lively dance that blends.

The fasting wolf,
Teeth bared to an ally wind,
gumming its essence,
then biting its freezing fate.

Watch: fur hood blown back
My face hardens into illusions of warmth,
the ashen color of firepit rock.
Gone like smoke,
The paltry whims of my species.
I am snow's promised groom,
inheritor of children's crystalline delight.

❖ Reality ❖

Isn't What it Used to Be

Walter Truett Anderson,
(Harper and Rowe, 1990)

This a difficult book, at once a brilliant moral discourse on the problems besetting contemporary culture and yet suffering from the disease of punditry--finding redemption through the advantage of analysing a problem succinctly without ever solving it.

Anderson takes the point of view that our culture has become so saturated with belief systems that we now tend to wear them as fashion and treat them all as fads. As a result, we perceive of belief systems as social constructions of reality.

If Anderson would only stick to his analysis, this would be one of the great books of our time. Unfortunately, he also insists upon playing libertarian judge with every belief system he confronts. Nothing that imposes sanctions on our current behavior (or his theory) makes the cut into the next century. It makes me wonder if any critic of beliefs simply can not permit himself to believe anything on its own behalf.

...One of the many questions the green/bioregional story fails to confront is personal choice. Although strong in its advocacy of genetic diversity, it is weak in the area of psychological and social diversity. The Greens have little to say about how to deal with people who just don't *want* to live simply in their bioregions, who want to live in another bioregion, or to travel all over and be world citizens or to identify with communities--of science, art, and religion, for example--that have no geographic base at all. No way to deasl with such people except to sermonize about their wrongness. The trouble with ideological stories that decide how everybody should live is that sooner or later the person who tries to turen the prescription into reality finds it necessary to use force.

...A new superculture comes into being, wraps itself around the globe